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Null objects in Basque Spanish and the issue of language dominance

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Null objects in Basque Spanish and the issue of language dominance

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Abstract

Null objects in Basque Spanish and the issue of language dominance

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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Referential null objects are attested in several varieties of Spanish that are in contact with other languages. Some of them coexist with languages with rich agreement system, e.g., Spanish in contact with Quechua and Basque (cf., e.g., Landa 1995; Franco 1993; Sánchez 1998). The availability of such null objects is thought to be due to some type of transfer from the contact language. As such, bilingualism and language dominance are relevant in determining whether or not a speaker drops objects.

One objective of this work is to examine the Spanish language forms of Basque-Spanish speakers of disparate levels of Spanish and Basque abilities, with the aim of determining the role of dominance in the occurrence of null objects. Results obtained from naturalistic data contradict previous claims on dominance. Statistical analysis concludes that dominance is not a factor that determines the occurrence of null objects.

Furthermore, closer analysis of the data suggests that these findings challenge previous hypotheses regarding the semantic nature that licenses null objects. Data

conflicts with claims on animacy being the feature that allows object drop demonstrating that the picture is less clear than suggested in earlier proposals.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many languages license the dropping of the object of the transitive construction. Standard Spanish allows null objects only when the referent is indefinite (Campós 1986). This phenomenon is more extensive in some varieties of Spanish. Literature has mainly focused on those varieties in contact with other languages (Sánchez 1998, Franco and Landa 1995, Escobar 1990, Urrutia-Cárdenas 2003, Suñer and Yépez 1998, among others). The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of null objects in Basque Spanish.

Basque Spanish is spoken in the northern region of Spain, the Basque Country. Basque is the regional and autochthonous language of this area, and Basque and Spanish are co-official languages. Nowadays, there is a strong tendency towards bilingualism in this area (Azurmendi et al. 2008). Traditionally, the object drop is claimed to be the outcome of such contact situation in Basque Spanish.

In this study the null object phenomenon is approached from two different perspectives. The first one is language dominance, and aims to examine the occurrence of null objects in speakers with disparate levels of language. More specifically, I focus on two groups of speakers. One is composed of speakers with Spanish as their dominant language, and the other one is formed by participants whose first and dominant language is Basque. The second approach intends to explain semantic features that license object drop in Basque Spanish.

There are eight sections in this study, including this one. §2 is an overview of the sociolinguistic background of the Basque Country. §3 presents some syntactic and morphological features that Spanish in the Basque Country most probably acquired

due to Basque influence. §4 outlines the phenomenon of null objects in Spanish, specifically in Basque Spanish. §5 reviews previous claims on language dominance as a factor determining the occurrence of null objects, as well as the conditions that can possibly predict cross-linguistic effects. §6 explains the present study, pointing out objectives, research questions, hypotheses, methodology, and results. §7 provides a discussion on language dominance and semantic features licensing null objects. Finally, §8 offers the main conclusions of the study.

2.0 SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION

Spanish and Basque have co-existed for centuries in the Basque Country. During the twentieth century, the dictatorship under Franco led to the decline of the use of Basque, as Spanish was the only official language. During the second half of that century, strong industrial opportunities in the Basque Country favored the immigration of Spanish citizens from other parts of Spain to this northern region. Consequently, the number of Spanish monolinguals increased considerably. Nevertheless, new laws, policies, and social movements have supported and encouraged the revitalization of the Basque language for the last decades. The objective of the majority of these initiatives is the normalization of a bilingual society and statistics show that this is the tendency (Azurmendi et al. 2008).

There are about 2 million citizens in the Basque Autonomous Community, and about one third of them have knowledge of the Basque language.¹ As shown in Table 2.1, in recent years, the number of people who can speak Basque has increased.

Table 2.1 *Number of Basque speakers* (EUSTAT)²

Year	Basque speakers
1991	528,520
1996	591,422
2001	633,934
2006	665,749

¹ Data in this section only takes into account The Basque Autonomous Community (BAC).

² Basque Statistics Institute (EUSTAT)

However, the tendency towards bilingualism should not be interpreted as Basque being used more than Spanish. Table 2.2 presents the number of people that identify Basque as their first language or second language, and their use of Basque.

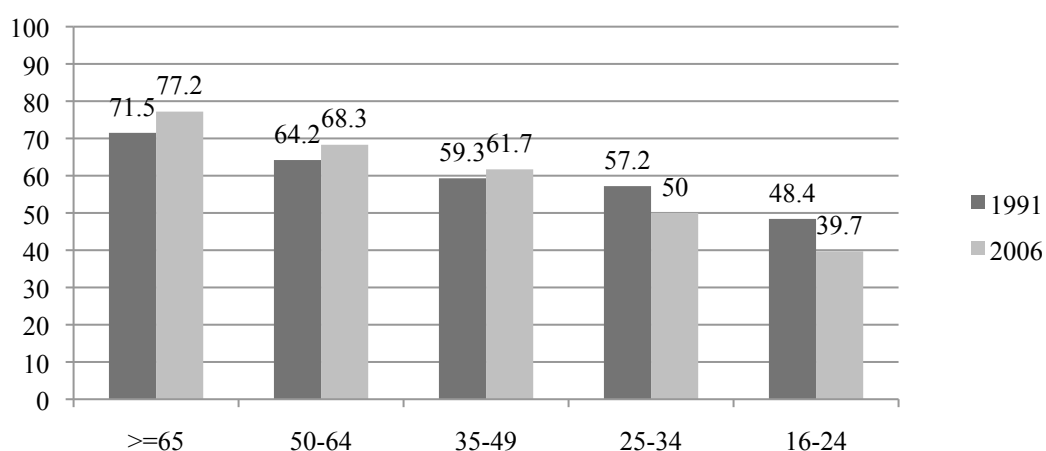
Table 2.2 *Use of Basque by L1/L2 speakers* (adapted from EUSTAT 2001)

Basque as L1/L2	Language Use	
Total	Total	639296
	Active Basque speakers	269319
	Active bilinguals	163870
	Passive Basque speakers	567113
Basque L1	Total	365972
	Active Basque speakers	256264
	Active bilinguals	74663
	Passive Basque speakers	35045
Native bilinguals	Total	58104
	Active Basque speakers	4276
	Active bilinguals	36348
	Passive Basque speakers	17480
Basque L2	Total	215220
	Active Basque speakers	8779
	Active bilinguals	25368
	Passive Basque speakers	181073

Most citizens are passive Basque speakers; they can speak Basque but do not use or barely use it. Native Basque speakers are the only group in which most people maintain Basque as their primary language of communication. Among native bilinguals, the tendency is to continue using both languages. In the cases where speakers choose one language over the other one, Spanish is used more often than Basque. Thus the majority of Basque L2 speakers are passive Basque speakers, some of them are active bilinguals, while a few are mainly Basque speakers. Looking at the

three groups, we observe that there is stronger tendency towards choosing Spanish over Basque. In Figure 2.1, we observe that the number of bilinguals who used Basque is at the same level or more than Spanish in 1991 and in 2006.

Figure 2.1 *Evolution of bilinguals who use Basque at the same level as or more than Spanish.* (EUSTAT)



At first glimpse, this table shows that the younger the population is, the lower the use of Basque among bilinguals. Bilinguals aged 65 or more are the ones who used Basque the most in 1991 as well as in 2006. The number of people using Basque at the same degree as or over Spanish increased during that period of time. This tendency is observed among speakers who are over 35. However, the younger the population is, the less Basque is used among bilinguals. In 2006, only 39.7% of bilinguals between 16 and 24 favored Basque over Spanish, or both languages were spoken to a similar degree.

Thus, the sociolinguistic situation of the Basque Country has undergone some changes in the last decades. There are more Spanish-Basque bilinguals, and middle-

aged and elder people tend to use Basque as much as, or more than, Spanish. The younger the population is, the more favored Spanish use is. This could suggest that a change in preference of language in the linguistic choice of bilinguals in the Basque Country has been taking place in the last two decades.

3.0 BIDIRECTIONAL CONTACT-INDUCED CHANGES

As noted in §2 Basque and Spanish have been in contact for several centuries. Contact between the two languages is bidirectional but some researchers (Trask 1998, Urrutia Cárdenas 1995) have claimed that contact-induced changes at the morphological and syntactic level can be deemed minimal considering their lengthy close coexistence. This might be due to their typological dissimilarities, as Spanish and Basque are very distinct languages. The first is an Indo-European Romance language that derived from Vulgar Latin, while the latter is a Pre-Indoeuropean isolate language. Spanish is a typical SVO Romance language with a basic case system and rich prefixing morphology, among other features. Basque, on the other hand, is a well-behaved SOV language (according to the classification by Greenberg 1966) with almost all of the characteristics of these kinds of languages. It is strongly agglutinative and contains preposed modifiers, a rich case system, verb-final word order, an abundance of non-finite verb forms, etc. In this section, some syntactic and morphological features that Basque is thought to have acquired due to Spanish influence are shown followed by features that Spanish grammatical elements with Basque substrate.

3.1 Romance influence in Basque

As stated above, Basque grammar still remains quite intact without having undergone drastic changes due to contact with Spanish. However, the language has also undergone some meaningful modifications. In this section two instances illustrate contact-induced effects in Basque.

Relative clauses are prepositional in Basque and the embedded clause takes relativizer *–en*, as in (3.1). Spanish relative clauses are postpositional and a relative pronoun *quien* is inserted to the subordinate clause as in (3.2).

- (3.1) *Opariak eman dizkioda-n haurra nire hiloba da.*
 Gifts give AUX-REL kid my niece/nephew AUX
 ‘The kid to whom I gave gifts is my niece/nephew.’
- (3.2) *El niño a quien le he dado los regalos es mi sobrino.*
 The kid to whom him AUX give the gifts is my nephew
 ‘The kid to whom I gave gifts is my nephew.’

In (3.3) we observe another type of relative clause that involves the two strategies of Basque and Spanish (Jendraschek 2007). This construction still contains *–en* but also the relative pronoun *zein*. Example (3.3) is more ‘Spanish-like’ since word order is also changed when there is a relative pronoun. Thus, Basque now presents postpositional and prepositional relative constructions as result of language contact.

- (3.3) *Haurra zein-i opariak eman dizkioda-n nire hiloba da.*
 Kid REL-IO gifts give AUX-REL my nephew AUX
 ‘The kid to whom I gave gifts is my niece/nephew.’

Another instance of Spanish influence in Basque is the dative overmarking discussed by Austin (2006). Basque verbs encode subject, direct object, and indirect object information in the verb. Spanish in the Basque Country tends to make a distinction between pronominal human and non-human direct objects: pronominal human direct objects take the indirect object pronominal clitic. These two factors of Spanish led Basque to insert the indirect object agreement morpheme in some monotransitive verbs. In (3.4) the verb is transitive and it contains a subject (ergative) morpheme, and a direct object (absolutive) morpheme. In (3.5) we have the same verb and situation but instead of the direct object (absolutive), the verb is marking the direct object, as well as indirect object (dative), even if the verb is monotransitive.

- (3.4) *Nik zu entzun zaitu-t*
 ERG.1sg ABS.2sg hear ABS.2sg-ERG.sg
 ‘I have heard you-ABS.’
- (3.5) *Nik zuri entzun zaitu-t*
 ERG.1sg ABS.2sg hear ABS.3sg-DAT.2sg-ERG.1sg
 ‘I have heard you.’
 (Austin 2006: 140)

Thus, even if Basque maintains the peculiarities of its grammar, some changes involving word order and verbal agreement, among others, have been attributed to contact with Spanish. In the following section, contact effects that Basque has had on Spanish are presented.

3.2 Basque influence in Spanish

Urrutia-Cárdenas (1995) conducted a study of Spanish spoken in the Greater Bilbao area, concluding that some features could be attributed to the influence of Basque. Two morphological borrowings that belong to Basque Spanish are the Basque diminutive *-txu* and place adjective *-arra*. For instance, in Spanish one frequently refers to a person *Pedro* as *Pedrito*, where diminutive *-ito* is added. However, in Basque Spanish a common way to address that person is *Pedrotxu*. The suffix *-arra* is a common device in marking the place where something or someone is from, for instance, *Donostiarra* instead of the Standard Spanish ‘de Donostia’ ‘from Donostia’, and *Getxoarra* instead of the Standard Spanish ‘de Getxo’ ‘from Getxo’. As in Basque demonstratives are also used without any pejorative sense (e.g. *Alicia y estas llegaron tarde* ‘Alicia and these arrived late’, instead of the Standard Spanish, *Alicia y ellas llegaron tarde* ‘Alicia and they arrived late’). There is also a strong tendency to insert the definite article of the possessive instead of using the possessive

adjective in Basque Spanish (i.e. *La madre vino* ‘The mother came’, instead of Standard Spanish *Mi madre vino* ‘My mother came’).

Basque Spanish exhibits another feature of Basque in which the focus is on the preverbal position, as mentioned by Echenique Elizondo (1997) and Urrutia (1995). Frequent use of the preverbal focus is observed in Basque Spanish as shown in (3.6a) and (3.6b), which contrast with (3.6c).

- (3.6) a. HA HECHO el camino la chica.
 has done the path the girl
 b. EL CAMINO ha hecho la chica.
 the path has done the girl
 c. LA CHICA ha hecho el camino.= Std. Spanish
 the girl has done the path

Mood could also show Basque influence. It has been argued that the use of indicative form is considered to be favored in conditional constructions in Basque Spanish (3.7) as opposed to the Standard Spanish (3.8). Ridruejo (1975: 134 as cited in Urrutia-Cárdenas 1995: 256) claims that the subjunctive form is replaced by "the more similar to the original one (the indicative form)". This feature is not only observed in the Basque Country but also in other neighboring areas. It might not be a substratum, but that the Basque influence most probably favored this structure (Urrutia Cárdenas).

- (3.7) *Si tendría dinero, lo haría.*
 If would.have money it would.do
 ‘If I would have money, I would do it.’
 (3.8) *Si tuviera dinero, lo haría.*
 If had money it would.do
 ‘If I had money, I would do it.’

The clitic paradigm has been claimed to have undergone significant changes in this variety of Spanish (Fernández Ulloa 2005, Urrutia-Cárdenas 1995, Echenique

1997, among others). One such change is the extensive use of *leísmo*, the insertion of the indirect object clitic *le/les* for direct objects as in (3.9a) as opposed to (3.9b).³

Basque could possibly instantiate the use of *leísmo* in Basque Spanish.

- (3.9) a. *A las chicas les vi.*
 the girls them saw
 ‘I saw them / the girls.’
 b. *A las chicas las vi.*
 the girls them saw
 ‘I saw them / the girls.’
 (Urrutia Cárdenas 1995: 246)

However, Basque influence in the clitic system in Basque Spanish has been questioned in recent years, as will be explained in §4. Another characteristic that the Basque Spanish pronominal paradigm exhibits is the null object phenomenon (see §4).

In summary, we have presented some of the possible contact-induced effects that illustrate the bidirectional influence between Basque and Spanish. Among them, this study focuses on null objects.

³ *Leísmo* is a dialectal variation that occurs in several varieties of Spanish spoken in Spain. It frequently involves using the indirect object pronoun *le* instead of the masculine direct object pronoun *lo*. In Basque Spanish *le* can refer to either a masculine or feminine person.

4.0. NULL OBJECTS AS A VARIABLE

This chapter focuses on one specific feature of Basque Spanish— the null object phenomenon, which consists of the dropping of the object. Some varieties of Spanish, such as those varieties in contact with Quechua, Guarani and Basque, allow null objects in contexts where non-contact Standard Spanish does not (Campos 1986; Escobar 1990; Landa 1995; Sánchez 1998; among others). Traditionally, it has been accepted that these varieties of Spanish exhibit a less restrictive use of null objects due to the contact with another language. Some authors (Zarate 1976; Urrutia-Cárdenas 2003, among others) suggest that some sort of influence from Basque triggers the omission in Basque Spanish, while others (Landa 1995; Landa and Franco 1995) strongly put into question such a position. This section offers an overview of the previous literature on null objects in contact Spanish. After describing the phenomenon, the hypotheses of Sánchez (1998) and Franco and Landa (2001) are briefly explained. Finally, we return to the discussion of whether the phenomenon can be considered to be the outcome of the linguistic contact between Spanish and Basque.

4.1. Null objects in Spanish

Since Campos (1986) it has been widely accepted that Standard Spanish offers the possibility of omitting the direct object clitic of transitive verbs when the referent is indefinite. Sentence (4.1a) is a question containing a transitive verb followed by an indefinite object NP. In the answer (4.1b), the verb is preceded by the object clitic and

followed by a *pro*; (4.1c) has neither a lexical object NP or a clitic, though, the understood referent is indefinite (*un lápiz*).

- (4.1) a. ¿Trajiste un lápiz?
“Did you bring a pencil?”
b. Sí, lo traje.
“Yes, I brought it.”
c. Sí, traje.
“Yes, I brought.”

Thus, Standard Spanish allows null objects in a very restricted distribution, that is, when the antecedent is indefinite. Nevertheless, null objects are grammatical in some varieties of Spanish, even if the referent is definite. Sentence (4.2a) is the counterpart of (4.1a), and instead of containing an indefinite object NP, the object is definite. Standard Spanish only allows (4.2b) as an answer to the question; (4.2c) is considered to be grammatical only in certain varieties, such as, Andean Spanish and Basque Spanish. In (4.2b) the verb contains an object clitic that is expected in Standard Spanish since the referent is definite whereas in (4.2c), we observe a case of null object, that is, a clause where the object clitic is missing.

- (4.2) a. ¿Trajiste el lápiz?
“Did you bring the pencil?”
b. Sí, lo traje.
“Yes, I brought it.”
c. Sí, traje.
“Yes, I brought.”

There are different hypotheses on the nature of licensing the dropping of the objects in varieties other than the Standard Spanish. Below we review Sánchez (1998) and Franco and Landa (2001), two works often cited.

4.2. *Sánchez (1998)*

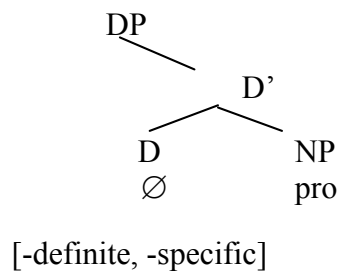
Sánchez (1998) offers an analysis of null objects in Quechua and Spanish, which she extends to Basque Spanish. According to Sánchez, Quechua and Standard Spanish possess a null pronoun in the object position: the difference between them lies in that the first one has variable null objects while the latter contains pronominal null objects. Following Camacho, Paredes & Sánchez (1997), she argues that variable null object languages like Spanish do not allow an intervening antecedent between the empty category and its antecedent in the same sentence (4.3), while pronominal null object languages do, like Quechua in (4.4). The null object in the Standard Spanish (4.3) is variable and the intervening antecedent *pro* is not allowed; thus the sentence is ungrammatical. However, in Quechua, (4.4) is possible, as the pronominal null object permits the intervening antecedent *Huwan*.

- (4.3) *Felipe trajo [un pañuelo] para que pro_j tengas $[e]_i$.
Felipe brought a handkerchief so that have
“Felipe brought a handkerchief for you to have (it).”
- (4.4) $[Mariya]_i$ *yacha-n* $[Huwan]_j$ $[e]_i$ *muna-n-ta*.
Mariya know-3.s Huwan love-3.s.-ACC
“Mariya knows Huwan loves (her).”
(Sánchez 1998: 233)

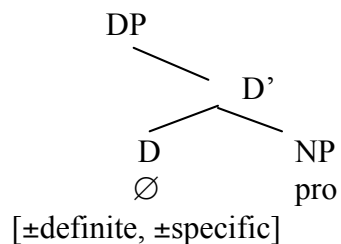
On Sánchez’s account, the grammaticality contrasts in (4.3) vs. (4.4) illustrate the parametrical dichotomy of the Spanish and Quechua. Pursuing this line of thought, she argues that the Spanish variety in contact with Quechua transitioned from the variable setting to the pronominal one, rendering sentences such as (4.3) grammatical in the contact variety. Such a transition is possible, she argues, due to the transfer of D^0 feature specifications; Quechua has no specificity requirement on null objects and this less restrictive specification is transferred into Spanish. She proposes that both

languages have a null pronoun in the object position. This null pronoun is the consequence of the matching of the semantic features of the antecedent and the pronoun. The diagrams in (4.5) and (4.6) show the complementary distribution of variable null objects (4.5) and pronominal null objects (4.6). While Standard Spanish in (4.5) requires D and NP to match in the feature [-specific, -definite] of the antecedent and the null object, Quechua in (4.6) does not impose such restriction.

(4.5) (Standard Spanish)



(4.6) (Quechua)



Sánchez's Transfer of D^0 Hypothesis is attractive in its simplicity: speakers transfer the less restrictive feature specification of the D^0 heading the null pronoun from Quechua into Spanish. Sánchez argues that her analysis can be extended to the phenomenon of null objects in Basque Spanish:

Another advantage of the present proposal is that it can be extended to Basque Spanish to account for the directionality of the change toward pronominal values. Why are variable null objects not part of Basque Spanish? Again, this

is because null pronominals in Basque can be headed by a [+definite, +specific] D⁰. (Sánchez 1998: 239)

The merits of this extension are taken up by Franco and Landa (2001)

4.3. Franco and Landa (2001)

Franco and Landa (2001) contend that the Transfer D⁰ Hypothesis cannot explain the phenomenon of referential null objects in Basque Spanish. Specifically, they challenge the view that Spanish in contact with Quechua and Basque Spanish exhibit the same feature specifications. They draw on data such as in (4.7), a counterexample to the D⁰ specification feature that Sánchez (1998) proposes. Note that (4.7a) contains a direct object NP that is the referent of the null object in (4.7b). The referent is definite and specific; however, in (4.7b) the null object is not allowed and the sentence is ungrammatical in Basque Spanish, as it is in Standard Spanish.

- (4.7) a. *Has matado al perro?*
Have.you killed the dog
“Have you killed the dog?”
b. **Sí Ø_i he matado.* (ungrammatical in Basque Spanish)
Yes I have
“Yes, I have / Lit. I have killed.”
(Franco and Landa 2001: 314)

This pair of sentences contrasts with the one in (4.8) from Peruvian Spanish, where the dropping of objects with a definite, specific, and also animate referents is allowed.

- (4.8) a. *Entonces mata a la oveja.*
Then she-kills A the sheep
“And then, she kills the sheep.”

- b. *Sí, mata* [e].
 Yes she-kills
 “She sure did.”
 (Sánchez 1998: 230)

Franco and Landa (2001) conclude that only objects with inanimate referents can be dropped in Basque Spanish. In (4.9), as well as in (4.7), the referent is definite and specific, but only (4.9) is possible in this variety because the reference of the dropped object is inanimate. Franco and Landa (2001) conclude that inanimacy, and not specificity or definiteness, determines and licenses the dropping of the objects in Basque Spanish.

- (4.9) a. *¿Compraste el traje azul?*
 Did you buy the blue suit?
 b. *Sí compré Ø_i.*
 Yes, I bought.
 (Franco and Landa 2001)

In addition, Franco and Landa point out that Basque Spanish only allows clitic-doubling with animate objects and that *leísmo* – the cliticization of third person animate direct object by the etymologically dative clitic *le* – is also found in this variety. Based on these facts, they argue that Basque Spanish has developed an independent syntax that holds a consistent system, where null objects are part of the pronominal paradigm. As shown in Table 4.1, the paradigm is semantically primarily determined by the animacy feature.

Table 4.1 *Third person accusative clitic paradigm in Basque Spanish.*

	Singular					Plural			
	Masculine		Feminine		Neuter	Masculine		Feminine	
	+	-	+	-		+	-	+	-
	animate	Animate	animate	animate		animate	animate	animate	animate
DO	<i>Le</i>	<i>lo/Ø</i>	<i>Le</i>	<i>la/Ø</i>	<i>lo/Ø</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>los/Ø</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>las/Ø</i>

Referencing this clitic system, Franco and Landa propose an alternative analysis of the dropping of objects in Basque Spanish. In this proposal, Basque Spanish exhibits mixed strategies for encoding coreferential relations for null pronominals. The null elements are licensed in the same way as other *pros* in Basque Spanish — via topic binding. The topic can be either abstract or present as a nominal constituent and it has to c-command the empty category. Therefore, the mixed strategy they present allows for null pronouns to be licensed via agreement binding (as in the usual case) or via topic binding.

It is important to note that lacking from this analysis of null objects in Basque Spanish is any reference to the potential contribution of Basque. This is a notable absence, given the antecedent literature on Basque influence in null objects. I know turn to this point.

4.4. Basque influence in null objects

Following Zárte (1976), the development of null objects in Basque Spanish has often been suggested to be due to its influence from Basque (Urrutia-Cárdenas 2003; Echenique Elizondo 1997; Fernández Ulloa 2006; among others). Landa (1995) challenges this view claiming that such influence has not been borne out. In order to

better understand this controversial issue, we examine the third person clitic paradigm in Basque Spanish, and also, the Basque verbal morphology.

Table 4.2 and Table 4.3, adapted from Urrutia-Cárdenas (2003), show the most general use of the third person clitics in Basque Spanish and Standard Spanish, respectively. The indirect object clitics *le(s)* or *se* remain identical in Standard and Basque Spanish. As noted above, it is broadly accepted that when the referent is inanimate, null objects are allowed in Basque Spanish. When the direct object referent is animate, *leísmo* — the use of the dative clitic *le(s)* for accusatives — is predominant in this variety while Standard Spanish only allows *lo/la(s)*.⁴

Table. 4.2 *Third person clitic paradigm in Basque Spanish*

	Singular					Plural			
	Masculine		Feminine		Neuter	Masculine		Feminine	
	+	-	+	-		+	-	+	-
	animate	animate	animate	animate		animate	animate	animate	animate
Direct object	<i>Le</i>	<i>lo/Ø</i>	<i>Le</i>	<i>la/Ø</i>	<i>lo/Ø</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>los/Ø</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>las/Ø</i>
Indirect object	<i>le (se)</i>		<i>le (se)</i>			<i>les (se)</i>		<i>les (se)</i>	

Table. 4.3 *Third person clitic paradigm in Standard Spanish*

	Singular					Plural			
	Masculine		Feminine		Neuter	Masculine		Feminine	
	+	-	+	-		+	-	+	-
	animate	animate	animate	animate		animate	animate	animate	animate
Direct object	<i>Lo</i>		<i>La</i>		<i>lo</i>	<i>Los</i>		<i>Las</i>	
Indirect object	<i>le (se)</i>		<i>le (se)</i>			<i>les (se)</i>		<i>les (se)</i>	

⁴ Note that RAE (Royal Spanish Academy) accepts the use of *le/les* to refer to an animate masculine accusative.

Basque is characterized by being a strongly agglutinative language, and so is its verbal system. The verbal morphology includes subject and object information. As seen in (4.10), Basque verbs contain morpheme-by-morpheme information of the arguments.⁵ The ergative element is the second person and singular subject. As for the absolutive morpheme, a zero morpheme is part of the paradigm. As seen in (4.10), the third person singular can be a zero morpheme. In (4.11) the verb is bitransitive and it is composed of an ergative, and a dative morpheme. A zero morpheme represents a third person absolutive referent. Thus, the third person absolutive morpheme can be silent or overt in Basque.

- (4.10) a. *Saldu al zen - Ø_i - u - (e)n ogi - rik_i?*
 Sell int. 2sg.E-3s.A- aux-past bread-Part
 “Did you sell any bread?”
 b. *Bai, saldu n - Ø - u - (e)n*
 Yes sell 1sg.E-3sg.A-aux-past
 “Yes, I sold.”
- (4.11) a. *Jon-ek eman al z - i - o_i -n argazkia_i Amaia-ri?*
 Jon-E give int. 3.sg.E-3.sg.A-3.sg.D-past picture Amaia-to
 “Has Jon given the picture to Amaia?”
 b. *Bai, eman n - i - o -n.*
 Yes give 1.sg.E-3.sg.A-3.sg.D-past
 “Yes, I gave.”

Another characteristic of Basque that must be pointed out is the unrestricted possibility of omitting the subject or object argument if the referent is unambiguous or after the reference is established. For instance, in (4.10a) the absence of an explicit subject NP does not create any confusion for a speaker as the ergative verbal morpheme *zen-* disambiguates its reference; the *zen-* particle could only refer to a second singular entity, that is, *you*. On the other hand, when an argument is non-pronominal third person, the speaker would be required to insert a lexical NP in order

⁵ E: ergative; A: absolutive; D: dative; int: interrogative particle; part.: partitive.

to avoid any misunderstanding. In (4.10a) the absolutive NP is the explicit *ogirik*. Once the referent is established, the language allows a null argument, as is the case in (4.10b).

In summary, Spanish and Basque demonstrate important similarities and differences that are pertinent to null objects. For instance, the object can be replaced and marked by a referential object clitic in Spanish, while in Basque the object is marked by verbal morphology except in some third person paradigms. This point is critical in order to understand the different hypothesis on the presence or the absence of the influence of Basque in Basque Spanish null objects.

Urrutia-Cárdenas (2003) is one of the authors who support the presence of Basque influence in the phenomenon at issue:

La naturaleza aglutinante del verbo vasco, que integra as marcas de sujeto y complemento directo e indirecto, según los referentes, y la relevancia de la oposición animado/ no animado en la organización del paradigma de casos, han influido no sólo en el *leísmo* y la duplicación del paradigma, sino también en la supresión de determinados clíticos de la 3ª persona.⁶ (Urrutia-Cárdenas 2003: 525)

As seen in Table 4.2, the object clitic paradigm in Basque Spanish is determined by the animate/inanimate opposition. Urrutia-Cárdenas (2003) argues that

⁶ Translation: The agglutinative nature of Basque verbs, which include subject, direct object and indirect object elements according to the referents, and the relevance of animate/inanimate opposition in the organization of the case paradigm, influenced not only in *leísmo* and the duplication of the paradigm, but also the the omission of certain 3rd person clitics.

it is plausible that the Basque morphology contributes to such distinction, as follows, ‘El contacto de lenguas (euskera-castellano) es la causa fundamental de las peculiaridades de los clíticos de 3ª persona en el Gran Bilbao y en el País Vasco respecto a otras variedades del español y de otras lenguas romances’ (Urrutia-Cárdenas 2003: 530).⁷

Urrutia-Cárdenas suggests that Basque L1 speakers assume (incorrectly) that the Spanish verb comprises the object information and this would lead to the null object phenomenon. According to him, the *euskaldunzarras* (Basque L1 and Spanish L2 speakers) omit the clitic more than the *euskaldunberris* (Spanish L1 and Basque L2 speakers), and the *erdaldunes* (monolingual Spanish speakers) are the ones that drop the object the most frequently. He argues that the difference in the verbal system between the two languages and the peculiarities of the clitic systems, as well as the higher incidence of null object phenomenon among Basque L1/Spanish L2 speakers, are indicators of a Basque substratum in the null object phenomenon in Basque Spanish.

The proposal by Landa (1990) was the first to question the traditional literature that linked omission of objects to Basque substratum. In this and subsequent studies (Landa 1995 and Landa and Franco 1995), she claims that such influence is more of an assumption than an attested fact, and that if there is any type of borrowing, this must be of the restructuring type. Landa (1995: 229) states: “if there has been an influence from Basque into Basque Spanish as regards the diffusion of the null object construction, that influence cannot be direct”.

⁷ Translation: The contact of languages (Basque-Spanish) is the fundamental cause of the peculiarities of the third person clitic system in the Greater Bilbao and in the Basque Country in respect to other varieties of Spanish and of other Romance languages.

Both Basque Spanish and Basque have constructions with null objects. In Basque the direct object NP can be omitted freely, while in Standard Spanish it can be null under certain constructions. Landa explains that the broader distribution of null objects in Basque Spanish, in contrast to Standard Spanish, occurs because of a potential loss of the restriction on an already existing structure. Following Prince (1992) and Silva-Corvalán (1993), among others, Landa (1995), and Landa and Franco (1995) postulate that the possibility of grammatical permeability between languages depends on the pre-existence of parallel structures in both languages, and they attempt to demonstrate that this is not the case in the phenomenon presented here.

Prince (1992) explains that the matching of structures is not to be solely limited as a morpheme-by-morpheme chain. She clarifies that in the matching of structures, speakers might perceive independently motivated surface structures as irrelevant and the two constructions could be considered parallel. Landa and Landa and Franco attempt to find the matching structure in Basque and Basque Spanish.

Suñer (1988) (see also Franco 1993) claims that object clitics are agreement morphemes in Spanish. Pursuing this line of thought, even though they ultimately discard it, Landa and Landa and Franco consider the possibility of a morpheme-by-morpheme parallelism. Null object clitics in Basque Spanish can be parallel to the zero object verbal morpheme in Basque but the absence of morpheme is only partial in Basque. As seen in (4.10-4.11), the Basque verbal morphology may contain a silent or overt absolutive morpheme.

They explore other possibilities and they propose that speakers draw parallels between (4.12a) and (4.12b). From this point of view, Basque Spanish verbs and Basque verbs consist of tense, aspect, mood and subject agreement morphemes. However, object agreement morphemes are not part of Basque Spanish verbs, while Basque include them. Note that clitics are not part of the parallel structure in (4.12b).

- (4.12) a. Basque Spanish: [V + tense/aspect/mood morphemes + subject agreement morphemes].
b. Basque: [V + all verbal morphemes]

Landa and Franco present, among others, three arguments to support the structural parallelism in (4.12). First, Basque object morphemes have a fixed position, while Spanish has preverbal or postverbal clitics. Second, in Spanish the paradigm only includes the root, tense, aspect, mood and subject agreement morphemes, whereas, in Basque the object morpheme is also included. The third evidence they offer in supporting the claim that speakers perceive the Spanish clitic *lo*, and the Basque object morpheme as different is that, “Spanish object clitics can easily be referred to in isolation in metalinguistic sentences by linguistically unsophisticated speakers, whereas desinential verbal morphemes such as tense+subject agreement in Spanish and the inflectional absolutive agreement markers in Basque cannot” (Landa and Franco 1996: 165). Given these assumptions, they conclude that there is no pre-existing parallelism between Basque Spanish and Basque null object phenomena. Instead, they offer an alternative explanation on how Basque Spanish could develop the dropping of null objects.

Basque shows the redundant character of the verbal morphemes, as they can co-occur with lexical objects. This is the case with the subject in Spanish, where the

encoded subjectival morpheme is present in the verbal structure, and the nominal subject can also be overt in a sentence. However, the direct object is presented as a lexical NP or as a clitic in Spanish.⁸ Thus, they argue that in Basque Spanish, the direct object argument or clitic seems to have acquired the [+redundant] property, licensing it to be null.

Therefore, they claim that the substrate influence hypothesis cannot be maintained because there was no pre-existing structural parallelism in the encoding of direct objects in Spanish and Basque, and they understand that the only possible influence that Basque could have in Spanish is a loss of restriction on null objects in Basque Spanish that is still operative in Standard Spanish (Landa 1995). In support of this argument, Landa claims that this phenomenon is not part of French, also a Romance language, in contact with Basque. Referential null objects with monotransitive verbs are not part of any variety of French including the one spoken in the area in contact with Basque. She clarifies that “the lack of pre-existing parallelism between Basque and French as regards the construction under study precludes the possibility of grammatical permeability from Basque into French” (Landa 1995: 225).

4.5 Summary

The intricacies of the null object phenomenon were briefly presented in this section. Null objects are mainly realized in Spanish varieties in contact with other languages, and several authors argue that this phenomenon is the outcome of a linguistic contact situation. This claim leads some authors to argue in favor of a

⁸ There are cases of clitic-doubling for the direct object in Spanish if it is pronominal as in, *Juan lo vio a él* ‘Juan saw him (him)’. For purposes of this study, we are not taking into account this phenomenon.

unifying account of the phenomenon, such as the Transfer D^0 Hypothesis (Sánchez 1998), for Andean Spanish and Basque Spanish. However, it has also been claimed that the Basque Spanish null objects are a more complex phenomenon, and also that the semantic features that license the dropping of the object in Andean Spanish and Basque Spanish are different.

On the other hand, even if the influence of Basque in Basque Spanish is traditionally accepted, such a cross-linguistic effect has been questioned (Landa 1995 and Landa and Franco 1995). They suggest that the only influence Basque possibly has had on Basque Spanish null objects is only the restructuring type.

5.0. LANGUAGE DOMINANCE AS A FACTOR

In the last decades, there have been numerous studies on the role of language dominance in interlingual effects in bilingual grammars; however, little consensus has been reached. While some researches, such as Hulk and Müller (2000), argue in favor of a unitary or single language system where only typological constraints condition the influence of one language on another one, others, such as Kupisch (2007), more cautiously state that the properties of the target language, as well as language directionality, must be taken into account when predicting cross-linguistic influence. In this section, we will first review some observations on what role language dominance, and/or the first language, plays in the null object phenomenon in Spanish. Then, the proposals of Hulk and Müller (2000), and Kupisch (2007) on predicting cross-linguistic effects are outlined.

5.1. Language dominance and bilingualism in the issue of null objects in Spanish

As discussed, the phenomenon of null objects in Spanish is frequently thought to be initiated by or as a result from contact with another language. Therefore, one could think that speakers of contact varieties of Spanish would exhibit more cases of the omission of the object in their speech than would speakers of non-contact varieties. In fact, several studies support this claim. Escobar (1990) carried out an extensive study on the bilingual variety of Spanish language and speakers in Peru. In broad terms, she describes and classifies different types of Quechua/Spanish bilingual speakers, and attempts to explain the criteria that define different levels of bilingualism, or different stages of the acquisition of Spanish as a second language.

She examines three linguistic variables: deictic terms, prepositions, and the use of the direct object, including the null objects. In her study, participants, all bilingual, are divided into three groups: L1 Quechua speakers, L1 Spanish speakers, and bilinguals that acquired both languages at the same time. Escobar presents a very detailed scale of the most relevant social variables that contribute to the differences in the bilinguals' speech. For the purpose of this paper, the most interesting finding is that all bilinguals use null objects, though there is a significant quantitative difference in their occurrence among the different linguistic groups. Speakers who are L1 Quechua speakers and are exposed to Spanish spoken by bilinguals in Lima exhibit a considerably higher number of omitted objects than speakers who are native bilinguals and are mainly surrounded by monolingual Spanish input. These findings point to the contribution of the L1 as well as input in the occurrence of null objects in Peruvian Spanish.

The extensive work on Peruvian Spanish by Sánchez (1998, 2003) supports this conclusion on null objects. Her study includes not only bilinguals, but also monolinguals. The participants are divided into three groups: Quechua/Spanish bilinguals receiving education in Spanish, bilinguals in a bilingual educational system, and Spanish monolinguals. The results of a picture-sentence matching task significantly differ from bilinguals to monolinguals, with monolinguals preferring constructions with clitics, clitic doubling, and strong pronouns to null objects, and bilinguals accepting null object structures as well as the other ones. Sánchez argues that “the grammar of the monolingual group diverges from that of the two bilingual groups with respect to the licensing of null pronouns” (Sánchez 2003: 153). As

pointed out in §4.2., Sánchez (1998) interprets such findings as suggesting that L1 Quechua speakers transfer feature specifications, such as specificity and definiteness, to Spanish. Thus, whether a bilingual is L1 Spanish or L1 Quechua seems to be relevant in their use of null objects.

Language dominance, bilingualism, or the level of Spanish spoken by speakers have been claimed to contribute to the omission of the clitics in Basque Spanish too. In her study of the clitic system of several varieties of Spanish, Fernández-Ordoñez (1994) observes different stages of the Spanish clitic acquisition by Basque speakers. According to her, “El habla de los bilingües cuya primera lengua es el eusquera (y con un dominio escaso del castellano) se caracteriza por suprimir sistemáticamente los clíticos de acusativo” (Fernández-Ordoñez 1994: 38).⁹ Thus, when a Basque speaker has a low Spanish proficiency (or is Basque-dominant), clitics are systematically omitted. As the learning process continues, bilinguals begin to introduce accusative clitics; they are usually limited to contexts where the referent is animate (as noted in §4.4., due to the *léismo* phenomenon, the animate accusative clitic tends to be *le* in Basque Spanish). The higher the Spanish proficiency of a speaker is, the more the use of accusative clitics increases. At this stage, clitics with inanimate reference, *lo* and *la*, are introduced to their speech, and they begin to be applied for animate referents but not for human ones. She observes that L1 Basque bilingual speakers insert the clitics with a non-human reference as a final stage of their acquisition in their grammar.

⁹ Translation: the speech of bilinguals whose first language is Basque (and have a low level Spanish proficiency) is characterized by systematically omitting the accusative clitics.

Other studies also point out that the occurrence of null objects might vary depending on bilingualism or language dominance. For instance, Urrutia-Cárdenas (2003) draws a difference among Spanish speakers whose L1 is Basque, whose L2 is Basque, and monolinguals. Basque native speakers show a higher tendency towards the omission of objects, while Spanish monolinguals would be the group that drops the object less frequently.

On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that authors such as Ortiz López and Guijarro-Fuentes (2006) do not find such differences based on proficiency in the contact Spanish spoken in the Dominican-Haitian border, leading them to ultimately reject the idea that language dominance is a relevant factor conditioning the omission of objects. Haitian Creole, as opposed to Quechua and Basque, does not encode the accusative referent in its verbal morphology. The clitic in Haitian Creole is superficially similar to the Spanish counterpart. However, they function as phonological clitics rather than syntactic ones, and they cannot be dropped. Ortiz López and Guijarro-Fuentes compare the results of three groups: Haitian subjects whose L1 is Creole and Spanish is L2 (interlingua as they define), Dominican-Haitian participants whose L1 is Haitian Creole and Spanish is L2, and Dominican Spanish monolinguals. They conclude that,

Estos hallazgos nos llevan a proponer que la presencia u omisión de los objetos directos está condicionado más por aspectos internos de tipo semánticos ([+humano / -humano] > [animado / inanimacidad] > [definido / indefinido] > [específico / no específico]) que por factores externos, como es

el contacto lingüístico o el grado de bilingüismo, como se había propuesto en trabajos previos.¹⁰ (Ortiz López and Guijarro-Fuentes 2006: 134)

The groups of speakers in this study do not differ in their quantitative use of null objects, thus, language dominance and bilingualism are not relevant factors in conditioning null objects in Dominican Spanish.

Concluding this section, bilingualism and/or language dominance have been said to influence the use of the null object construction in some varieties of Spanish, e.g., Peruvian Spanish and Basque Spanish, while the data from Haitian Spanish suggest that language dominance does not play such a relevant role in determining the use of null objects in this variety. As noted at the beginning of the section, the studies on the relevance of language dominance or bilingualism are inconclusive in the literature. Nevertheless, tendencies in different varieties of the Spanish language have been observed. From this point of view, we would expect speakers whose first language is Quechua or Basque to exhibit a higher degree of null objects in Peruvian and Basque Spanish varieties.

Different cross-linguistic hypotheses have been proposed in determining whether or not language dominance is a possible factor in cross-linguistic influence.

¹⁰ Translation: These findings suggest us that the presence or omission of the direct object is conditioned more by internal semantic factors ([+human / -human]) > [animacy / inanimacy] > [definite / indefinite] > [specific / non-specific]) than external factors, such as linguistic contact of the degree of bilingualism, as has been proposed on previous work.

5.2. Cross-linguistic influence due to the language internal and/or external factors

Hulk and Müller (2000), and Kupisch (2007) examine the language-internal and -external factors that might play a role in the influence that one language may have on the other language in bilingual speech. These studies are relevant to the present investigation.

Hulk and Müller (2000) present a proposal that seeks to predict which morpho-syntactic phenomenon in a given language is more likely to experience cross-linguistic influence. Their main argument is that cross-linguistic influence will occur if two conditions are met: (i) an interface level between the two modules of grammar is involved and (ii) the two languages overlap at the surface level. This proposal is based on the findings of a previous longitudinal study (Müller and Hulk 1999) in which they observed the object drop phenomenon by two bilingual children, a Dutch/French speaking child and a German/Italian one. German and Dutch frequently drop the topic-object, while in French and Italian, the phenomenon is very restricted. The study reveals that cross-linguistic influence among the bilingual children occurs in both participants, thus language typology is determinant in predicting influence. Attempting to explain these results, they clarify that the first condition is met, as the phenomenon is at the C(omplementiser)-domain, i.e., at the discourse-pragmatics level, and the second condition is satisfied, because even if the dropping of the object-topic is very marginal in French and Italian, there is an overlapping situation between the two language systems that the children speak.

In support of these findings, Hulk and Müller (2000) analyze the root infinitives (RI) in the data collected from the Dutch/French and German/Italian

bilingual children. Root infinitives are possible in these Germanic languages and also in the two Romance languages, though the construction is minor in French and Italian and is only possible with exclamations and interrogations. The children use root infinitives optionally where adults would use finite root declaratives. The authors suggest that since condition (ii), referencing cross-linguistic overlap, does not hold in this case, their prediction that cross-linguistic influence will not be found is borne out by the results of the analysis. They conclude that external factors do not play a role in cross-linguistic influence, and that a bilingual child frequently develops two languages as two separate systems. As described above, there are very restrictive cases where such influence takes place, the phenomenon has to occur at the interface between syntax and discourse-pragmatics, and the two languages have to overlap at the surface level.¹¹

Kupisch (2007) advances Hulk and Müller's proposal explaining that not only language internal factors are relevant for cross-linguistic influence, but language dominance can also play a role. Hulk and Müller do not consider this extra-linguistic constraint, as participants in their study are fairly balanced bilinguals. Thus, Kupisch claims the Dominance Hypothesis can hardly be tested among these subjects. Attempting to offer some light on the relevance of language dominance, Kupisch's study involves four German/Italian bilingual participants, two balanced, and two unbalanced ones (each of them with a different strong or dominant language). In addition to the Dominance Hypothesis, Kupisch also tests the Complexity Hypotheses, which claims that cross-linguistic effects are conditioned by language

¹¹ Unsworth (2003) tests the criteria proposed by Hulk and Müller (2000) among German/English bilinguals concluding that the results were not predicted by the conditions.

internal factors. Taking into account language external and internal factors she argues that two predictions can be made. If the dominant language is more beneficiary or opportune to a certain grammatical domain than the less dominant one, and the two linguistic conditions, (i) an interface level between the two modules of grammar is involved and (ii) the two languages overlap at the surface level, mentioned by Hulk and Müller are satisfied, cross-linguistic influence is more likely to occur. On the other hand, if the strong language is not favorable to the grammatical domain in question, cross-linguistic influence is not expected even if the two language internal conditions are met. Thus, language imbalance and language typology are to be taken into account in predicting contact effect.

Her study examines Italian and German, the former is more beneficial than the latter towards the acquisition of determiners. The Complexity Hypothesis and Dominance Hypothesis predict that speakers prefer the least complex form, determiners in Italian. Thus, knowledge of Italian is expected to accelerate the use or acquisition of German articles among participants. Her results confirm her hypothesis. However, the most interesting point that Kupisch raises is the importance of language dominance among unbalanced bilinguals. As noted above, she observes that if the strongest language is beneficial to the acquisition of a grammatical domain, acceleration of this element in the other language is expected. On the other hand, if the strongest language is not favorable to the acquisition of such a grammatical phenomenon, cross-linguistic effects are unlikely to occur. Thus, she argues against the existence of two autonomous grammatical systems in a bilingual speaker claiming

that both language dominance and the properties of the target languages are to be taken into account in predicting cross-linguistic effect.

5.3. *Summary*

In this chapter we reviewed some studies that show that language dominance and bilingualism can be relevant or irrelevant factors in determining the occurrence of cross-linguistic influence. For instance, in Basque Spanish and Peruvian Spanish, extra-linguistic factors such as language dominance or bilingualism play a relevant role in the occurrence of null objects (Sánchez 2003, Escobar 1990, Urrutia Cárdenas 2003, among others). We also reviewed a proposal that predicts possible cross-linguistic influence. According to this proposal, grammar properties that belong to the interface level between two modules of grammar appear to be more likely to happen when the phenomenon overlaps at the surface level of the two languages involved (Hulk and Müller 2000). Directionality of the strong and weak languages also appears to be important (Kupisch 2007). Based on these proposals, the study in the following chapter discusses whether or not language dominance can predict the occurrence of null objects in Basque Spanish.

6.0 THE STUDY

Spanish and Basque have co-existed in the Basque Country for several decades and the contact have led to bidirectional linguistic influence effects. As discussed in the preceding sections, null objects have been argued to be one of the features that Basque Spanish acquired due to contact with Basque. In addition, native speakers of Basque are perceived to use this construction more frequently than native Spanish speakers. Thus, the native language or language dominance seems to contribute to the degree of null objects. The overarching objective of this study is to describe the use of null objects by Spanish- and Basque-dominant speakers, and to demonstrate that the results do not support some previous hypotheses concerning the phenomenon.

6.1 Research questions and hypotheses

The goals of this study are two fold. The primary objective is examining the Spanish language forms of Spanish-dominant and Basque-dominant speakers of disparate levels of Spanish and Basque, with the aim of determining the role of dominance in the occurrence of null objects. The second goal is to determine whether or not the previous theoretical analyses on null objects are borne out by the data. Special attention is paid to the Transfer D⁰ Hypothesis and the features that license the occurrence of null objects. In brief, the study addresses the following research questions:

1- Is there any quantitative difference between Spanish-dominant speakers and Basque-dominant in the dropping of the object in Basque Spanish?

2- What are the semantic features that condition the occurrence of null objects in Basque Spanish?

Two opposing predictions can be anticipated for the first question. First, several scholars have observed that native Basque speakers exhibit the omission of objects more frequently than native Spanish speakers. This leads us to predict that Basque-dominant speakers from a Basque-dominant area are expected to show greater incidences of the phenomenon than Spanish-dominants from Greater Bilbao, where Spanish is dominant. On the other hand, the proposal by Hulk and Müller (2000) predicts the opposite: as stated in §5.2, the two conditions that motivate the cross-linguistic effect involve interface level between two modules of grammar as well as the overlapping of the two languages at the surface level. The null object phenomenon does not fulfill the first condition as they are not part of the interface level between the two modules of grammar. On the other hand, I argue that the second condition is satisfied since the two languages overlap at the surface level. The overlapping of Basque and Basque Spanish is explained here.

The dropping of the object is more favorable to occur in Basque than in Spanish, thus Basque is more beneficial towards the dropping of the object than Spanish. A challenging issue raised by Franco and Landa is the identification of a Basque morpheme or word that can be considered as equivalent to the omitted particle in Spanish. In Basque the nominal objects can freely be dropped. Thus, if we assume

that the Spanish null object corresponds to Basque nominal phrases, an obvious overlap is found between Basque Spanish and Basque. In contrast, a more structural comparison leads us to think that Spanish pronominal clitics — commonly analyzed as verbal agreement morphemes (Suñer 1988, Franco 1993) — are comparable to Basque verbal agreement morphemes. Even if we assume this, there is still an overlap issue between Spanish and Basque. In Basque verbal morphology, there are instances where the third person absolutive case is null. One could argue that this occurrence is not generalized in the paradigm. However, when the verbal morpheme is null, there is no option to have an overt version of the silent morpheme, i.e., it is required to be silent. Taking this into account, we observe that pronominal null objects are optional in Spanish while they are obligatory in certain contexts in Basque. The overlap between Spanish and Basque is attested if we consider the Basque nominal element or the agreement morpheme to be the equivalent of the Spanish null object. I conclude that Basque is more opportune to the dropping of the object than Spanish. This predicts that no cross-linguistic effect will be found among Spanish-dominant speakers and Basque-dominant speakers. In cases in which the omission of the object occurs, Basque-dominant speakers will be more likely to exhibit a higher frequency of this construction.

As noted above, Basque is more beneficial towards the dropping of the object, and the Dominance Hypothesis (Kupish 2007) suggests that participants whose dominant language is Basque will show a higher tendency to omit the object.

Further implications can be made with the results obtained from language dominance relevancy or irrelevancy in the use of null objects. If the two groups show

a difference in the occurrence of object drop, this is probably triggered by some type of transfer from Basque into Spanish. Thus the Transfer D⁰ Hypothesis proposed by Sánchez would be borne out. Nevertheless, if there is no significant distinction in the degree of null objects between the two groups, the Transfer D⁰ Hypothesis cannot be borne out.

The second research question is not very easy to resolve. In Spanish null objects are limited to indefinite referents, and it has been argued that Basque Spanish licenses the dropping of the object in other distribution. For instance, objects with definite referents (Sánchez 1998) or inanimate referents (Franco and Landa 2001) have been argued to license the omission of the object. Research focused on this variety agrees in that inanimate referents license the dropping of object. Thus, we expect the animacy feature to be the semantic parameter that allows the null object phenomenon in Basque-Spanish.

6.2 Participants and location

There are twenty-one participants in the present study. The criteria for grouping subjects encompass two basic conditions: language dominance and the place of birth and residence of the subjects. In one group, there are eight subjects who are Spanish-dominant. They were born and live in the Greater Bilbao area, a predominantly Spanish-speaking area. Three of them are Spanish monolinguals, and five participants learnt Basque as a second language during their adulthood or at school. There is one participant, S06, who was born in a bilingual household.¹² He claims that he basically limits the use of Basque to communications with his maternal

¹² S# = Spanish-dominant participant; B# = Basque-dominant participant

relatives and that he feels more confident in speaking in more social contexts in Spanish than in Basque. The Spanish-dominant participants include men and women ranging in age from twenty-seven to fifty-nine.

Thirteen Basque-dominant bilingual form the other group. This group is more homogeneous than the previous one. It is composed of subjects who are twenty-six and twenty-seven years old, and were born and currently live in Azpeitia, a town located in Urola Coast Valley and known for being one of the most Basque-dominant speaking areas in the Basque Country. All subjects, except participants B15 and B18, were raised in Basque monolingual households, and their education was primarily conducted in Basque until they began college education.¹³ Thus, they grew up in a Basque-speaking environment, and they were introduced to Spanish at school at the age of five. It is important to point out that most of the media, digital or press is in Spanish, and consequently, these participants were exposed to Spanish since their childhood. Most of them use Spanish and Basque at work, and when they travel to other regions. Subjects B15 and B18 were raised in bilingual households. The mother of B15 is Spanish speaking with some knowledge of Basque, and the communication between mother and daughter is primarily held in Spanish. The father of B18 is a passive bilingual, but a Spanish monolingual speaker. He can only speak Spanish, but he is frequently addressed in Basque in his household. Basque is the first language in both families. All participants, except S03, have a college-level education. All Basque-dominant subjects, and four Spanish-dominant speakers completed their

¹³ In the Basque Autonomous Community the education is divided into different language programs. The curriculum is mainly the same but the language of instruction varies from one program to another. Basque-medium education, or 'Modelo D', is the one that applies Basque for all subjects except language classes other than the Basque language. On the other hand, students in the 'Modelo A' are taught in Spanish.

studies in Basque-medium education program, and the other Spanish-dominant speakers attended school in Spanish-medium education program.¹⁴

Escobar's (1990) findings point to the importance of the context of the acquisition of the language as well as the input one receives. In the following section explains some social factors on the sociolinguistic area of the origin and the place of residence of subjects.

6.2.1 Spanish and Basque in Greater Bilbao and Azpeitia

Greater Bilbao is a district that encompasses the metropolitan area of Bilbao including the surrounding suburban areas. It is located on the west of the Basque Country and Bilbao is the capital of the Biscay province. Azpeitia is a small municipality located in Gipuzkoa, a province in the east of Biscay. Table 6.1 offers a sense of the linguistic situation in the two areas. As shown, the areas present significantly different populations, not only in the number of inhabitants but also in language: half of the population of the Greater Bilbao are Basque speakers or quasi-Basque speakers, while the other half have no knowledge of this language. A different picture is seen in Azpeitia, where the vast majority of people speak Basque.

¹⁴ See participants chart in Appendix A and the language dominance questionnaire in Appendix B.

Table 6.1 *Population and Basque speakers in Greater Bilbao and Azpeitia* (adapted from EUSTAT 2006)¹⁵

	Greater Bilbao	Azpeitia
TOTAL	867,777 (100%)	13,814 (100%)
Basque speakers	207,659 (~24%)	11,376 (~82%)
Quasi Basque speakers	202,161 (~23%)	1,228 (~9%)
Non-Basque speakers	436,804 (~50%)	783 (~6%)

In Table 6.2 another difference between Greater Bilbao and Azpeitia is observed. Spanish is the first language of most people in Greater Bilbao, while in Azpeitia, Basque is the mother tongue of most of the population. Table 6.3 shows that Basque is not only the native language of most of the people in this locality but also the language spoken in most of the households, whereas in Greater Bilbao, Spanish is again more predominant in this environment.

Table 6.2 *Mother tongue* (EUSTAT 2006)

	Greater Bilbao	Azpeitia
Basque	48,307 (6%)	10,904 (79%)
Spanish	768,612 (86%)	2,243 (16%)
Both	28,853 (3%)	463 (3%)
Other	22,005 (3%)	204 (1 %)

Table 6.3 *Language spoken at home* (EUSTAT 2006)

	Greater Bilbao	Azpeitia
Basque	25,914 (3%)	8,973 (65%)
Spanish	797,211 (92%)	2,640 (19%)
Both	34,512 (4%)	2,149 (16%)
Other	10,140 (1%)	62 (0.5%)

¹⁵ Basque Statistics Institute. The total number of Basque speakers, and the total of Basque speakers, quasi Basque speakers, and non-Basque speakers slightly differs. Results belong to two data collections.

In Table 6.4 below the language of education is provided. Most students in Greater Bilbao study in Spanish-medium programs, while in Azpeitia there is no student schooled in such a program. In Azpeitia Basque-medium education is overwhelmingly predominant, and about 10% of the total opted for the bilingual system, where both Basque and Spanish are mediums for teaching. It is noteworthy that in Greater Bilbao, the educational system does not follow the strong Spanish-based trend observed before. Note, however, that the numbers of students who chose Basque-medium education (36%) is comparable to the number who chose Spanish (40%).

Table 6.4 *Languages of education* (EUSTAT 2006)

	Greater Bilbao	Azpeitia
TOTAL	137,751	2745
Spanish-medium education program	54,914 (40%)	0
Bilingual education	31,552 (23%)	239 (9%)
Basque-medium education program	49,385 (36%)	2,506 (91%)
Other	1,900 (1%)	0

The purpose of this description is to offer an overview of the different sociolinguistic contexts of the two areas chosen for this study. Participants from Greater Bilbao are Spanish-dominant speakers, and so is the district they live in. In contrast, the first and predominant language of the participants as well as the overall population from Azpeitia is Basque.

6.3 Methodology

Two different types of data were collected in this study: naturalistic data (conversation and narrative retelling) and elicited judgments (focused on grammatical structures). After completing a language history questionnaire, each participant was asked to read a mythological tale and retell it. Then each participant shared his/her thoughts, memories, anecdotes about childhood (suggested topic) or another topic of their choice. The interviewer met with subjects in a setting chosen by them; some preferred a more public space, such as a café, while others opted for their own or the interviewer's home. The range of the length of the recordings ranges from about ten to seventeen minutes.

The recordings were transcribed, and all pronominal and null objects of the direct object were tabulated quantitatively. The semantic features of the null objects were also analyzed; animacy, definiteness, and specificity are the focus features of this analysis.

A subset of the participants completed the grammaticality judgment task. Specifically, six Spanish-dominant speakers and six Basque dominant speakers were available to complete this task after the interviews took place. The questionnaire includes twenty-four sentences with and without null objects (Appendix C). The null objects have referents with different combinations of feature specifications such as animacy, definiteness, and specificity. Participants rate sentences on a scale of 1-5 (1: correct; 2: closer to correct than to incorrect; 3: neuter; 4: closer to incorrect than to correct; and 5: incorrect).

6.4 Results

Results obtained in this study are presented in the following order. First, the naturalistic data is analyzed, providing a quantitative description of all tokens and the semantic features of null objects. Next, we turn to the grammaticality judgment task in order to determine the features that speakers seem to reject and accept in the dropping of the objects.

6.4.1 Results: naturalistic data

A corpus of about 30,000 words was collected from interviews; 13,270 of them belong to Spanish-dominant speakers, and 16,500 to Basque-dominant speakers. There are a total of 211 tokens of pronominal and null objects for both groups. Table 6.5 gives a quantitative description of the number of tokens used by Spanish-dominant participants. Subjects greatly vary from one another in the use of null and pronominal objects. However, the null objects are limited to two or three per individual in most cases. S05 uses them more than others. Note that this subject also uses the pronominal objects more frequently; up to four times more than participants S02, S03, and S06. This might be the reason for the high occurrence of null objects in S05. In contrast S01 uses no null objects at all although he uses pronominal objects quite often.

Table 6.5 *Null objects and pronominal objects by Spanish-dominant speakers.*

Participant	Null objects	Pronominal objects
S01	0	11
S02	2	8
S03	2	7
S04	3	15
S05	8	34
S06	2	8
S07	3	24
S08	1	10
TOTAL	21	117

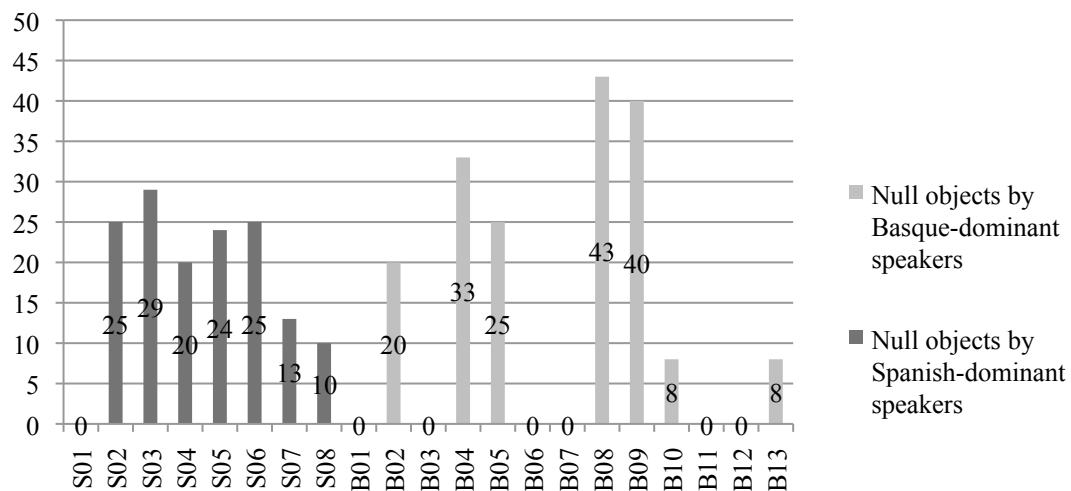
Basque-dominant participants also use null objects very infrequently. In fact, almost half of them use none, as shown in Table 6.6 below. Among the ones who drop the object, none of them uses this option more than three times. Interestingly, even though this group has more participants than the other one, and there is more extensive data collected from them, Basque-dominant speakers use fewer pronominal structures on null objects in their speech.

Table 6.6 *Null objects and pronominal objects by Basque-dominant speakers*

Participant	Null objects	Pronominal objects
B01	0	3
B02	1	5
B03	0	8
B04	3	9
B05	2	8
B06	0	5
B07	0	14
B08	3	7
B09	2	5
B10	1	12
B11	0	4
B12	0	1
B13	1	13
TOTAL	13	94

The Figure 6.1 below, shows the percentage of null objects used by each participant. Percentages are shown in the y axis (vertically), and participants are listed in the x axis (horizontally). The chart gives evidence of the greater variability among Basque-dominant speakers (between 0-43%) than among Spanish-dominant speakers (between 0-29%). B08 is the subject exhibiting the highest occurrence of null objects.

Figure 6.1 *Percentage of null objects per speaker*



In order to obtain statistical results, an independent samples T-Test was run using SPSS. The percentage of null objects among Spanish-dominant speakers is higher ($M = 18.08$, $SD = 9.72$) than the one among the Basque-dominant ($M = 13.63$, $SD = 16.54$). Levene's test for equality of variances is conducted and the two variances are found to be significantly different. This result might be due to the limited sample size. Another tentative reason could be the distinct standard deviation obtained from both groups, or the fact that more Basque-dominant speakers than Spanish-dominant speakers produce no null object. The T-Test concludes that there is no significant effect for dominance, $t(18.99) = .775$, $p = .448$, among Spanish-dominant speakers and Basque-dominant speakers.

To sum up, one of the most salient observations of the data is the limited number of null objects that speakers used. Also, it seems that there is a strong inter-speaker quantitative variability in licensing the dropping of the object, especially among Basque-dominant speakers. Finally, statistical results show that language-

dominance is not a significant factor determining the use of null objects in Basque-Spanish.

6.4.1.1 Semantic features

As noted earlier, participants do not exhibit a high degree of dropped objects in their speech. As a result, the feature specifications of null objects are analyzed with a holistic approach. Table 6.7 presents occurrences of object drop when the referent is specific, definite, and/or animate.¹⁶

6.7 Semantic features of null objects.

	Spanish-dominant speakers (21 tokens)	Basque-dominant speakers (13 tokens)	TOTAL (34 tokens)
+/- Specific	17/4	8/5	25/9
+/- Definite	15/6	5/8	20/14
+/- Animate	3/18	1/12	4/30
+/- Human	0/21	0/13	0/34

The majority (twenty-five) tokens of null objects (thirty-four) refer to a specific entity. This tendency is clearly seen among Spanish-dominant speakers. Of twenty-one null objects exhibited by Spanish-dominant speakers, seventeen have a specific referent. However, there is no clear tendency among Basque-dominant speakers: eight null objects are specific, while five tokens are non-specific.

The majority of tokens have definite referents. For instance, this feature licenses twenty null objects. Among Spanish-dominant speakers, a third of the tokens

¹⁶ Each feature was counted separately even though one null object might show two or more of these features.

also have a definite reference. Nevertheless, most of the objects that Basque-dominant speakers dropped have an indefinite antecedent.

There is a stronger tendency against null objects with animate referents even if they are marginally accepted. Of twenty-one tokens, eighteen have an inanimate referent, and there are only three occurrences with animate antecedent among Spanish-dominant speakers. Basque-dominant speakers show a similar pattern: twelve tokens are inanimate while only one has an animate referent. No occurrence of null object with a human referent was collected. Instances of speech samples including semantic parameters mentioned here can be seen below.

In (6.1) there is an instance of participant B04 licensing the dropping of the object with a definite referent. She is talking about *los regalos* ‘the gifts’, a definite referent. In the context of a transitive verb *traer* ‘bring’, a verb that requires a nominal or pronominal object.

(6.1) [+definite]

... *los regalos* que nos traían y para que el próximo año pues nos trajesen también más regalos todavía, ¿no? Porque sino igual no nos [e] traían. (B04)
‘... **the gifts** that they used to bring us and so that they would still bring us more gifts the following year too, ¿right? Because if not, they may not have brought [e] to us, if the kings saw us, they may not bring us any gift, ¿right? ...’ (B04)

In (6.2), B05 is talking about *una hamaquita* ‘a little hammock’ she struggled to open when she was a child. Thus the referent is a specific hammock she had during her childhood. She uses the transitive verb *abrir* ‘to open’ twice and the object referring to *una hamaquita* is omitted in the two cases.

(6.2) [+specific]

Tenía *una hamaquita* pero para niños para tres o cuatro años o lo que sea. Y que estaba yo en casa, en el comedor, intentando abrir [e] y que no podía y con todas las fuerzas y no podía, y no podía... Que mi madre me observaba y decía, “le voy a dejar a ver que hace y tal”, y que ella se fue a la cocina. Y

que me escuchaba a mí maldecir y todo, “porque no sé que mecauen la leche y tal”. Y eso con tres-cuatro años porque no podía abrir [e]. (B05)

‘I had **a little hammock** but the one for three or four-year old kids or whatever. I was at home, at the dinning room, trying to open [e] and I could not, and I could not... My mother was observing me and said, ‘I am going to see what she does’ and she went to cook. And she was listening to me cursing and all “damn it!”, etc, and that at the age of three or four because I could not open [e].’ (B05)

The last feature mentioned here is the animacy feature. In (6.3) the speaker S04 is talking about *un caballo* ‘a horse’, an animate, non-human referent. She drops the object when she refers to the animal to say how the owner was keeping the animal.

(6.3) [+animate, -human]

*.... La historia es que un amigo de mi padre tenía **un caballo**, así de pura raza árabe que se llamaba... , y [e] tenía ahí estupendo, ¿no?* (S04)

‘... The story is that a friend of my father had **a horse**, a pure-breed Arabian horse, that was called..., and he kept [e] wonderfully, ¿right?’ (S04)

Thus, several specificity features seem license null objects in Basque-Spanish. Tokens produced by Spanish-dominant speakers demonstrate that [+specific] and [+definite] features tend to trigger the occurrence of null objects. However, these features do not seem to be critical in allowing the dropping of the object among Basque-dominant speakers. No token with human referent was collected but animate antecedents are marginally accepted. The grammaticality judgment task focuses on semantic parameters too.

6.4.2 Results: grammaticality judgment task

As noted earlier, there are twenty-four sentences in the grammaticality judgment task (Appendix C), twelve of them containing null objects with different

combinations of feature specifications. Animacy, definiteness, and specificity are the three features taken into account.

Speakers show a strong prescriptive viewpoint in their judgments. Ten participants do not accept any instances where the object is omitted, not even the ones that are licensed in Standard Spanish – objects with indefinite referents. Only two participants, S02 and B08, recognize some sentences to be acceptable. Table 6.8 below illustrates their responses. Participant S02 does not accept the omission of the null object in the monotransitive construction when the referent is specific, indefinite, and non-human, and in the ditransitive one where the referent is specific, definite, and non-human. On the other hand, B08 recognizes those instances as appropriate but seems to use the animacy criterion in determining the correctness of the examples. The four sentences that contain a human referent are marked as non-acceptable, and almost all the other ones are acceptable. Surprisingly, the only sentence she does not accept with a non-human referent is also indefinite and non-specific.

Table 6.8 *Grammaticality Judgment results by S02 and B08*¹⁷

Features of null objects and sentences of the questionnaire	S02	B08
[-specific, -human, -definite] <i>Ane compró una tarta y puso en el frigorífico.</i>	2	4
[-specific, -human, +definite] <i>Todas las mañanas Miren recoge el correo y deja en mi escritorio</i>	2	2
[-specific, +human, -definite] <i>a) ¿Has visto a la mujer?</i> <i>b) Sí, he visto.</i>	2	5
[-specific, +human, +definite] <i>Los abogados no son muy queridos por la gente, la gente ve como enemigos.</i>	2	5
[+specific, -human, -definite] <i>Compré un cuadro de Goya que lo quería desde pequeña, y colgué en la entrada de mi casa.</i>	4	2
[+specific, -human, +definite] <i>Todas las mañanas Miren trae los periódicos y deja en mi escritorio.</i>	2	2
[+specific, +human, -definite] <i>Una amiga tuvo un hijo ayer y vamos a visitar mañana.</i>	2	4
[+specific, +human, +definite] <i>Amaia ha llegado esta tarde pero no he visto.</i>	2	5
[-specific, -human, -definite] <i>Aunque Eneko no va a poder ir a la cena, comprará una botella de vino y le dará a Jon.</i>	2	1
[-specific, -human, +definite] <i>Aitor recogerá los pasteles y le dará a Ander para que él los lleve a la cena.</i>	2	1
[+specific, -human, -definite] <i>Ha llegado un paquete para Josu. Él está en la sala, llévale.</i>	2	2
[+specific, -human, +definite] <i>La casa que compraron mis vecinos está en Zarautz. En realidad, el marido le regaló a su mujer.</i>	4	1

Sentences (6.4) and (6.5) are the two instances that S02 judged to be non-acceptable. The reference of the object in (6.4) is specific, non-human and indefinite.

(6.5) differs from (6.4) in that the null object is definite.

(6.4) [+specific, -human, -definite]
*Compré **un cuadro de Goya** que lo quería desde pequeña, y colgué*
bought a painting by Goya that it wanted since child and hanged

¹⁷ Scale from 1 to 5: 1= correct; 2= closer to correct than to incorrect; 3= neuter; 4= closer to incorrect than to correct; and 5= incorrect. Monotransitive verb (M) and ditransitive verb (D)

[e] en la entrada de mi casa.

[e] in the hall of my house

‘I bought a painting by Goya that I wanted since I was a kid, and I hanged [e] in the hall of my house.’

(6.5) [+specific, -human, +definite]

La casa que compraron mis vecinos está en Zarautz. En realidad, el

The house that bought my parents is in Zarautz. Actually the

marido le regaló [e] a su mujer.

husband her gave [e] to his wife

‘**The house** that my neighbors bought is in Zarautz. Actually, the husband gave [e] to his wife.’

As stated earlier, participant B08 also licenses the dropping of the object in other sentences. However, she does not agree with S02 in the semantic features of objects that are omitted. For instance, B08 does not accept the object drop in (6.6), a construction where the referent is indefinite, non-specific, and non-human referent. Except in this case, all the other instances that she rates to be unacceptable follow a clear criterion based on animacy.

(6.6) [-specific, -human, -definite]

Ane compró una tarta y puso [e] en el frigorífico.

Ane bought a cake and put [e] in the fridge

‘Ane brought a cake and put [e] in the fridge.’

In (6.7-6.10) are all the sentences of the task that have null objects with a human referent. B08 does not accept the omission of the object when the referent is human.

(6.7) [+specific, +human, -definite]

a) *¿Has visto a la mujer?*

Have seen **the woman**

‘Have you seen **the woman**?’

b) *Sí, he visto [e].*

Yes have seen [e]

‘Yes, I have seen [e].’

(6.8) [+specific, +human, +definite]

Los abogados no son muy queridos por la gente, la gente

The lawyers no are very appreciated by the people the people

ve [e] como enemigos.

see [e] as enemies

‘**Lawyers** are not much appreciated by people, people see [e] as enemies.’

(6.9) [+specific, +human, -definite]

Una amiga tuvo un hijo ayer y vamos a visitar [e] mañana.

A friend had a son yesterday and are going to visit [e] tomorrow

‘A friend had a son yesterday and we are going to visit [e] tomorrow.’

(6.10) [+specific, +human, +definite]

Amaia ha llegado esta tarde pero no he visto [e].

Amaia has arrived this afternoon but no have seen [e]

‘Amaia has arrived this afternoon but I have not seen [e].’

In brief, the judgments of participants are very prescriptive in this task. Only two participants allowed the use of null objects with some restrictions, and one of them, the Basque-dominant participant B08, showed a tendency to license the dropping of the object only with inanimate referents.

In the following section, a discussion on the implications of these results with respect to the research questions and hypotheses is presented.

7.0 DISCUSSION

One interesting finding of the results is that the null object phenomenon in Basque Spanish does not seem to be as prevalent as it has been suggested by the extensive literature on it. However, results do confirm that this construction is not limited to objects with indefinite referents as in Standard Spanish. This section has two main goals. First, we will clarify if language dominance could be deemed as an extra-linguistic factor constraining the occurrence of null objects in Basque Spanish. Second, we will attempt to determine which semantic parameters license the dropping of the object in this variety of Spanish.

In §6.3 two contrasting hypotheses are proposed regarding language dominance as a factor influencing the omission of objects. Based on statistical results in §6.4.1, language dominance does not constrain the occurrence of null objects among participants in this study. This finding conflicts with previous claims by many scholars, such as Fernández-Ordoñez (1994), and Urrutia-Cárdenas (1995). Urrutia-Cárdenas states that the native language is relevant in the occurrence of null objects. He points out that *euskaldunzarras* (Basque L1) omit the object more than *erdaldunes* (Spanish L1). On the other hand, Fernández-Ordoñez points out that native-like use of null objects is the ultimate achievement of the Spanish learning process for Basque L1 speakers. This could suggest that participants in this study are in the final stage of acquisition of objects. On the other hand, differences between the two groups were also found. Spanish-dominant speakers exhibit a more homogeneous quantitative use of null objects than Basque-dominant speakers. Almost half of the Basque-dominant participants do not drop the object. This hints at some kind of uncertainty with respect

to the use of Spanish clitics among Basque L1 speakers. Thus, we can argue that language dominance is an irrelevant extra-linguistic factor in determining the occurrence of null objects among Spanish-dominant and Basque-dominant speakers.

Cross-linguistic influence between languages has been frequently viewed as a phenomenon that includes extralinguistic and intralinguistic factors. Following this line of thought, Kupisch (2007) takes into account language dominance as well as the typological features of the languages involved. In §6.3 I argued that Basque is more opportune to the occurrence of null objects than Spanish. Given this assumption, the proposal by Kupisch predicts that if the two linguistic conditions presented by Hulk and Müller (2000) are met, Basque-dominant speakers are expected to exhibit a greater tendency in using null objects. Nevertheless, null objects are part of the syntactic domain, a domain correctly predicted to be impermeable.

Above I concluded that bilinguals with Basque as first language do not seem to transfer null objects from Basque onto Spanish. This leads us to wonder whether null objects in Basque are the outcome of cross-linguistic influence. As stated in §4.4, it has been widely accepted that contact with Basque instantiated the development of a more extensive system of null objects in Basque Spanish than the one observed in Standard Spanish. Landa and Franco (1995) bring up an interesting point in questioning the Basque influence hypothesis. They attempt to parallel the Basque and Spanish structures that speakers perceive as similar to determine whether there is a matching structure that involves null objects in these languages. Traditionally, Basque object phrases and Spanish object clitics are claimed to be constructions perceived as equivalent by speakers. Basque objects can be omitted freely, and in this view,

speakers would omit the Spanish clitic triggering the development of the null object phenomenon in Basque Spanish. However, as seen in §5.3, Landa and Franco state that Basque verbs, including argument agreement morphemes, and Spanish verbs, including subject agreement morphemes but excluding object agreement morphemes, are the parallel structures. However, they do not consider the possibility that speakers may perceive Basque lexical objects and Spanish pronominal object as parallel. Landa and Franco discard this possibility noting that Spanish clitics are syntactically equivalent to Basque object morphemes. Thus, they begin to explore the matching structure limiting their search to agreement morphemes. An interesting approach could be testing parallelism between Basque lexical and Spanish pronominal objects.

Setting this discussion of a possible historical transfer aside, we will turn to the Transfer D⁰ Hypothesis proposed by Sánchez. Basque dominant participants do not exhibit higher use of null objects than Spanish-dominant speakers. In fact, in this study eight Spanish-dominant participants omit the object slightly more frequently than thirteen Basque-dominant speakers. Also, there are six Basque L1 participants who never use this construction. The hypothesis of transferring semantic features of null objects from Basque to Spanish in bilinguals does not seem to be borne out by this study.

On the other hand, Sánchez (1998) proposes that Basque Spanish null objects are conditioned by the definiteness feature. Others, such as Franco and Landa (2001), argue that the semantic parameter that determines the occurrence of object drop in Basque Spanish is animacy. Results in §6.4.1.1 demonstrate that the features that license null objects in Basque Spanish do not limit themselves either to specificity,

definiteness, or animacy. In more than half the occasions where the object is omitted, the reference is definite and specific. Furthermore, there are four cases where animate references are licensed in this study. Note that we do not observe any instance of object dropping with a human referent.

The results show a blurrier picture than what the previous literature describes. In contrast to Franco and Landa's conclusion, Basque Spanish speakers use null objects with definite or specific referents. Also, non-human animate referents seem to license the dropping of the object. In order to obtain a better understanding of the semantic parameters determining the phenomenon, the grammaticality judgment task was expected to offer further information on the feature specifications. However, as noted in §6.4.1.1, the participants' position is very prescriptive in this task. The vast majority of them do not accept sentences with object drop in their judgments even if they use null objects when naturalistic data is collected. All participants in the grammaticality judgment task have at least college education, and their knowledge about prescriptive use of language could be a plausible conditioning factor in these results. Only one participant, B08, seems to follow a tendency based on semantic parameters in determining the acceptability of the sentences. Interestingly, the constructions deemed as not possible contain a human referent.

Therefore, Basque Spanish allows null objects with specific and definite features, and possibly with non-human animate references too. The occurrence of the dropping of objects constrained by the animacy feature should be further studied. Only four animate null object tokens are collected in this study. All of them make reference to a non-human object. Evidence hints at [+human] feature not to license

null objects, however, these four occurrences could also be considered as possible speech errors.

In order to obtain different kind of data regarding the null object phenomenon in Basque-Spanish, the study involves two methodological approaches, the naturalistic data collection through interviews and the grammaticality judgment task. Nevertheless, we observe that results do not necessarily lead to the same implications. Instead of limiting to one or the other approach, I argue that this situation evidences the need to apply the two different data sources. Participants could be more lenient in accepting sentences given in contexts, as they can portray real-life situations more efficiently. On the other hand, even if extensive naturalistic data is collected, a limited sample of tokens is extracted from it. In order to increase the number of tokens an elicitation task based on a question-answer task might be helpful in obtaining more cases of null objects. Increasing the number of tokens would not only be useful for a more conclusive statement on the semantic behavior of omitted objects but it could also offer more information on how Spanish-dominant speakers and Basque-dominant speakers use direct objects. An interesting approach for a follow-up study of objects could involve including non-pronominal objects in the study. Determining whether the two groups show any difference not only in the use of null objects, but also in the use of pronominal objects, might offer a better analysis of the phenomenon.

In short, null objects do not seem to exhibit quantitative differences among Spanish-dominant and Basque-dominant speakers. Semantic parameters involving the dropping of the object show a different scenario when compared to previous literature

described. Results in this study also evidence the importance of following more than one methodological approach in future research.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

In this report, I have analyzed null objects in Basque Spanish from two different perspectives: language dominance and semantic parameters. One objective was to determine the relevance of an extra-linguistic factor, language dominance. Moreover, semantic parameters licensing the omission of objects in Basque Spanish were discussed. The study included naturalistic data from two groups of participants, and a grammaticality judgment task was also conducted in order to obtain empirical data.

Results do not concur with previous claims on language dominance being a determinant factor in the occurrence of object drop. Spanish-dominant speakers and Basque-dominant speakers do not exhibit a significant quantitative difference in using null objects. Nevertheless, a more detailed observation of groups, suggests that Spanish-dominant speakers follow a more homogeneous pattern than Basque-dominant ones. This, along with the relatively fewer tokens collected from Basque-dominant speakers, urges a study including non-pronominal objects to examine a possible three-way relation among non-pronominal, pronominal, and null objects.

The semantic parameters licensing the dropping of the object are less clear than predicted. Animacy has frequently been claimed to condition the occurrence of the phenomenon. In this study we conclude that definiteness and specificity features do not limit null objects in Basque Spanish. Interestingly, objects with animate reference were also omitted. In such cases, no human reference was observed, and the scarcity of tokens with animate references prevents stronger conclusion on the relevance of this semantic feature.

Finally, the study evidenced the inconsistent information one can extract from data collected with different methods. Naturalistic data demonstrated that, even if the null object phenomenon is not extremely prevalent, Basque Spanish speakers exhibit it. However, several of them rejected the acceptability of the construction in the grammaticality judgment task. I argue that instead of following one or the other method, both approaches should be taken into account in order to obtain a better understanding of the occurrence of null objects and the attitude of participants towards them.

Appendix A

Participants' information:

Spanish-dominant participants

Participant	Place of birth/ Place of residence	Age/ Gender	Language	Studies
S01	Bilbao/ Bilbao	59 / Female	Spanish monolingual	Graduate studies
S02	Bilbao/ Bilbao	25 / Male	Bilingual (school knowledge of Basque)	Graduate studies
S03	Bilbao/ Bilbao	34 / Male	Bilingual (fluent Basque speaker)	High School diploma
S04	Bilbao/ Bilbao	27 / Female	Bilingual (fluent Basque speaker)	Graduate studies
S05	Santurtzi/ Getxo	58 / Male	Spanish monolingual	Graduate Studies
S06	Barakaldo/ Trapagaran	36 / Male	Native bilingual	Bachelors
S07	Bilbao/ Barakaldo	35 / Female	Spanish monolingual	Bachelors
S08	Barakaldo/ Barakaldo	54 / Male	Bilingual (intermediate- fluent Basque)	Technical Institute

Basque-dominant participants

Participant	Place of birth/ Place of residence	Age/ Gender	Spanish knowledge since	Studies
B01	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B02	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B03	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B04	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	27 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B05	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	Spanish speaking mother	Bachelors
B06	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B07	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Male	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B08	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	Spanish speaking father	Bachelors
B09	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B10	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Male	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B11	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	25 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B12	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Female	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors
B13	Azpeitia/Azpeitia	26 Male	5 years old (at school)	Bachelors

Appendix B

Language questionnaire:

- 1- At what age did you begin learning Spanish and/or Basque? In what context?
- 2- In what language do you read newspapers, books, etc. ?
- 3- In what language do you watch, TV, movies, etc. ?
- 4- What language do you use at work?
- 5- What language do you use when you are with your friends?
- 6- What is the language you use with your relatives?
- 7- What is the language you use in your daily life?

Appendix C

Sentences of the grammaticality judgment task:

- 1- Ane compró una tarta y puso en el frigorífico.
- 2- Lorena venía andando cuando empezó a llover.
- 3- Todas las mañanas Miren recoge el correo y deja en mi escritorio.
- 4- Me encanta viajar en tren.
- 5- a) ¿Has visto a la mujer?
b) Sí, he visto.
- 6- a) Mikel, ¿has visto mi bolso?
b) No, debe de estar por la cocina.
- 7- Los abogados no son muy queridos por la gente, la gente ve como enemigos.
- 8- Quisiera tener muchos coches y que uno de ellos fuera un Porsche.
- 9- Compré un cuadro de Goya que lo quería desde pequeña, y colgué en la entrada de mi casa.
- 10- La chica de la tienda estaba regalando entradas para el concierto.
- 11- Todas las mañanas Miren trae los periódicos y deja en mi escritorio.
- 12- Esa chica suele estar en esa esquina todos los viernes a las cinco en punto.
- 13- Una amiga tuvo un hijo ayer y vamos a visitar mañana.
- 14- La dependienta se hartó de que la gente tirará la ropa al suelo y volvió al trabajo después de un breve descanso.
- 15- Amaia ha llegado esta tarde pero no he visto.
- 16- a) ¿Te gustaría tener un perro en casa?
b) Me encantaría.
- 17- Aunque Eneko no va a poder ir a la cena, comprará una botella de vino y le dará a Jon.
- 18- Podríamos ir a Paris en tren.
- 19- Aitor recogerá los pasteles y le dará a Ander para que él los lleve a la cena.
- 20- Volví de la playa con los pies quemados.
- 21- Ha llegado un paquete para Josu. Él está en la sala, llévale.
- 22- ¿Puedes dejar de hacer el payaso?
- 23- La casa que compraron mis vecinos está en Zarautz. En realidad, el marido le regaló a su mujer.
- 24- Este reloj debe de ser muy antiguo.

Glossary

Abs/A: absolutive
Aux: auxiliary
D: determiner
Dat: dative
DO: direct object
DP: determiner phrase
ERG/E: ergative
Int: interrogative
IO: indirect object
NP: noun phrase
Part: partitive
Rel: relative
V: verb

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Vita

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